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# THE GREAT FOOD ADVENTURE



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One of the greatest childhood adventures is exploring the tastes, colors and textures of food. And one of the most important and challenging adventures of parenthood is bringing food and children together so that they learn good nutrition practices.

Learning to eat is one of the most important skills children develop because it affects their health now and in the years to come. The immediate benefits are obvious – a child who is alert and energetic, able to resist illness and infection, and grow to full genetic potential. The long term benefits of a healthier adult are also worth striving for. Current research links obesity, heart disease and high blood pressure to poor eating habits, many of which have roots in childhood.

A child learns from experience, and by imitation. To a child there are real discoveries made when given the chance to feel, experiment, watch and wonder why. The adults in a child's life can foster this learning, and teach good food habits by positive attitudes and examples in their own eating practices.

*Are you ready for an adventure?*

### **Sensible Eating . . . or What to Feed Your Child**

Children's food needs are the same as adults' except the amounts differ. Canada's Food Guide is a parent's best friend when it comes to selecting the food children (and adults) need. Variety is also a key. The more varied the diet is, the less chance a child has of missing out on important nutrients.

Sensible eating, then, is offering a variety of foods from the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide. The four food groups, and the servings recommended for preschoolers are:

milk and milk products	2 to 3 servings
fruit and vegetables	4 to 5 servings
bread and cereals	3 to 5 servings
meat and alternates	2 servings

## **Milk and Milk Products**

This group provides calcium, protein, vitamins A and D and riboflavin for the formation of healthy bones, teeth and other body tissues.

Examples of one serving in this group are: 250 mL (1 cup) or milk, or cottage cheese or 200 mL ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) yogurt or 45 g (1½ oz.) of cheese. Your child may only want part of a serving as any one time – that is 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) or 200 mL ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) of milk. The important thing is that the total day's intake is equivalent to three full servings.

Milk can be added to the diet in many ways: cheese, yogurt, or add milk to soups, casseroles, or puddings. Children who don't like plain milk, usually enjoy it when it is mixed with fruit in a blender, or baked in a custard. Rice custard, especially if it has plenty of nuts and raisins, is a favorite of many children.

## **Fruit and Vegetables**

In addition to supplying vitamins A and C, fruits and vegetables contain iron and fibre. These nutrients perform a variety of functions such as maintaining healthy skin, increasing resistance to infection, and ensuring healthy red blood.

Four to five servings of the fruit and vegetable group are recommended daily. Two of these servings should be vegetables, particularly the dark green, yellow and orange varieties. Children love the crunchy, crisp texture of raw vegetables.

The two other servings in this group should be fruit or fruit juice. One fruit high in vitamin C should be eaten every day. Citrus fruit or juice, and vitaminized unsweetened apple juice are good sources of vitamin C.

There are many fruit-flavored drinks, crystals and powders in the supermarket. These contain sugar, artificial flavoring, and sometimes vitamin C. These products should not be regarded as a substitute for fruit juices, because they do not contain the wide variety of nutrients naturally present in fruit.

Examples of one serving in this group are: 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) fruit or vegetable juice, 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) vegetable or fruit (roughly equivalent to one medium apple – or one medium potato).

## **Bread and Cereals**

Breads and cereals provide B vitamins, iron, carbohydrate and fibre. These nutrients are important for the normal functioning of the nervous and digestive systems.

Whole grain foods are better choices than refined products as they contain more vitamins, minerals and fibre. Sugar-coated cereals are not recommended. They cost more, and encourage a taste for highly sweetened foods.

Examples of one serving in this group are: one slice of bread, one roll or muffin, 125-200 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup) cooked rice, macaroni, or spaghetti or 125-250 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 cup) cooked or ready-to-eat cereal.

## **Meat and Alternates**

Meat and alternates are sources of the B vitamins, iron and protein. These nutrients aid normal growth and development and help build and repair body tissues. Although meat is a popular part of our diet, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, and legumes are nutritious, and often less expensive substitutes.

*Preschoolers should not be left alone when they are served seeds or nuts because of the danger of choking.*

Examples of one serving in this group are: 60 g to 90 g (2 to 3 oz.) fish, poultry, meat or liver; 2 eggs, 60 mL (4 tablespoons) peanut butter; 250 mL (1 cup) cooked dried legumes such as beans, peas, or lentils; or 80 mL to 250 mL ( $\frac{1}{3}$  cup to 1 cup) nuts or seeds.

## **Your Child's Appetite**

Although parents know better than the child *what* he should eat, the healthy active child is a pretty good judge of *how much* he needs to eat.

Just as we adjust the size of a cup or the eating utensils to small children, we need to adjust food portions. Offer small amounts and let the child ask for seconds. Portions that are too large can be overwhelming to a small child or they may encourage overeating and lead to weight problems.

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It's not unusual for a child's appetite to vary from day to day. Appetite will also vary from year to year, depending on their rate of growth. After one year of age, growth slows down so there is a decrease in appetite between the ages of one and two. If you are prepared for this you will not be concerned or anxious about how much your child is eating.

If you are worried about your child's appetite, keep a record of what and how much he/she is eating. A record-keeping form is included at the end of this booklet. You may find you're worrying needlessly, or you may find some areas you want to change.

### **Snacking Sensibly**

Young children have small stomachs, and can't always eat enough at mealtime to keep them going till the next meal. As a result, they often need between-meal snacks. Choose snacks from the four food groups.

Sweet snacks, such as candy, cookies or soft drinks should be discouraged, since they may satisfy a child's hunger, but offer little food value, and promote tooth decay.

Raisins and other dried fruit are also damaging to teeth when eaten as snacks, because of the stickiness of the fruit and the concentration of natural sugar.

Beware of salty snack foods such as potato chips or pretzels. They may encourage your child to develop a liking for salty foods. A high salt intake is one of the factors contributing to the development of high blood pressure.

Children not accustomed to finding sticky, sugary or salty snacks in the kitchen, and who don't see adults eating such things, will be less likely to develop a taste for them. Since children model themselves after the adults in their lives, you may need to make some simple but important changes in your eating and buying patterns in order to make good nutrition easy for the whole family.

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Here are some tasty and nutritious snacks, children like.

- cottage cheese or peanut butter on a whole grain cracker
- celery stuffed with cottage cheese or peanut butter
- fruit juice popsicle
- raw vegetable strips
- bran muffin
- bagel with melted cheese
- orange juice and yogurt, whirled in a blender
- cheese chunks
- fresh fruit

Advertising does influence the type of snacks a child will ask for. Adults should resist the urgings of children to buy sticky, sugary and salty snacks foods that are heavily advertised.

### **Preparing Foods for Tots**

An adult doesn't have to be a gourmet cook to prepare foods that appeal to children. Youngsters usually prefer simple foods. They like to know what they are eating, and don't always appreciate sauces and unusual flavor combinations.

To make food interesting to young children, offer a variety of textures colors and flavors.

Children, as well as adults, appreciate eye appeal, and with a little imagination, irresistible-looking foods can be created.

Color plays an important part in the presentation of food. Children especially enjoy brightly-colored placemats, dishes and garnishes.

Finger foods, such as cheese cubes or raw vegetable sticks, are easy for little hands to manage. Servings should be small – huge portions are overwhelming to little people.

### **Let Children Explore**

Many things that are simple and ordinary to an adult are sources of wonder and adventure for a child. You have known for a long time the color of a cantaloupe, how to crack an egg, how to spread peanut butter on bread, or how to husk corn. Food is naturally attractive to most children – let them explore it.

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Plan food-centered activities that stimulate the child's imagination and lead to the discovery of new tastes, textures and smells. Help the child be more receptive to new foods. Try talking about the color or texture of a new food. Explain where it comes from and how it grows. Don't restrict explorations to mealtime - any time is the time to learn. If a parent doesn't mind a small mess at the kitchen table, they should allow their child to feel new foods, exploring their texture.

Here are some stimulating activities designed to help the child learn about food:

#### STORY TELLING:

The folk tales of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Three Bears*, or the nursery rhymes of *Miss Muffet* or *Little Jack Horner* are examples of only a few of the many children's stories and poems on food.

Children's literature and music is an adventurous way of introducing new foods to your child, or helping him learn more about familiar foods.

#### COOKING:

Despite the odor of burnt toast or sticky peanut butter on the kitchen table, parents who prepare foods with their children find it an excellent way for their child to learn about textures, tastes and the names of foods. Pouring, peeling, stirring, spreading, taking turns and cleaning-up are a few of the other skills and experiences children can learn.

#### HOME GROWN FOODS:

Planting seeds and watching food grow, stimulates the child's interest in eating these foods.

#### MYSTERY BOX:

All kids love games. Place food in a box or bag. Have the children close their eyes and reach into the box. Ask them to describe the shape and texture of the food and try to identify it. This is a good way to introduce a new snack food and is also a fun game at birthday parties.

## Travelling with a Child

Eating well-balanced and nutritious meals while travelling requires planning. Parents should select foods from the four food groups, cut into serving-sized pieces. They may be wrapped in individual packets. The following are good travelling foods:

- raw vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower, green pepper or celery
- fresh fruits
- cans of unsweetened fruit juice (if cans are refrigerated or frozen first they'll keep other foods cold)
- chunks of meat, chicken legs (freeze and let thaw along the way or store in a cooler)
- small containers of yogurt
- bite-size pieces of cheese
- hard boiled eggs
- whole wheat rolls, muffins, crackers

In restaurants along the way, the rules of good nutrition still apply. In a fast food restaurant, children should be encouraged to choose a cheeseburger and juice, or a fishburger and milk, or pizza and milk. Fresh fruit may be included to supplement these meals.

Many restaurant meals have such generous portions, that splitting a meal between an adult and a child may be desirable.



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## Parties and Special Occasions

It isn't necessary to have a lot of food, or unusual food for special occasions. A party can be created by mood far better than by a lot of high-fat, sugary foods – candles to celebrate a birthday can be stuck into a carrot cake, a pizza, or a watermelon.

Here are some nutritious party foods:

- Fresh fruit juice, unsweetened. If it's too expensive to serve seconds, follow up with water and ice cubes.
- Fresh fruit smoothies. Prepare in a blender by combining milk or juice (orange, apple or grape) with fresh or frozen fruit (such as peaches, oranges, strawberries, etc.). To make the drink thicker, and more like a milkshake, add a banana, and an ice cube. For a rich 'milkshake', add a spoonful of powdered milk.
- Raw vegetable pieces. Finger-size portions of celery, carrots, green peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, mushrooms, cherry tomatoes.
- Homemade pizzas are nutritious and delicious. These are great fun at a party. Whole wheat bread dough, or the readymade kind, may be used, and a variety of toppings such as tomato sauce, sliced and grated cheese, mushrooms, green pepper and bits of meat. Children will like helping to 'decorate' the pizza as a party activity.
- Carrot cake with cream cheese icing.

## A Final Word

The way food is prepared and served is an important factor in promoting nutrition. Children as well as adults like food that looks appealing.

Good eating habits are learned by experience and example. Children will develop a taste for nutritious foods if they see others enjoying them too. Eating habits – good or bad – are developed within the family, or at nursery school, every day of the year. Food that is prepared and served with care in a comfortable and relaxed manner will help make mealtime a positive, enjoyable experience for everyone, and the great food adventure becomes the significant learning experience it should be.

## COMMON EATING PROBLEMS . . . AND HOW TO COPE

COMMON EATING PROBLEMS . . .	AS YOUR CHILD SEES IT	AS YOU MAY SEE IT	. . . AND HOW TO COPE
Refusal to eat	I'm not hungry, I'm sick. I've found a new way to get attention.	I must make him eat: growing children need food.	Respect the wisdom of the child's own body. A skipped meal will not hurt a healthy child, so remove the food without fuss after a reasonable length of time (20 - 30 minutes). Involve your child in food shopping, preparation and serving, for example, pouring his own milk, making sandwiches, setting the table.
Food jags: getting hooked on one food	I've found a wonderful new food. I've found a way to manipulate my mother.	I must make sure he eats a sensible diet.	Food jags aren't unusual in children or adults, and won't last long if no issue is made of them.
Dislike of new foods	I don't like the taste of this food. I don't want to try anything new today.	I like this food. I think my child should learn to like it too, and should adjust to our family's eating patterns.	Children, like adults, will have a few dislikes. If you have time, a substitute food from the same food group may be offered. If the dislike is treated casually, the child will probably learn to like it at a later date.



### Rejection of vegetables

I don't like the texture or smell of cooked vegetables. I'm bored with having the same one over and over again.

It doesn't matter whether the vegetables are eaten cooked or raw. Just be sure they are not overcooked. Children often prefer the bright colors and crisp textures of raw vegetables. Vegetable juices are another alternative.

Remember children are the world's best imitators. Your likes are quickly noticed - and copied.

### Dawdling, or playing with foods.

I want to explore this food. I need time to get used to these utensils. I'm not hungry. I'm too tired.

A child needs time to learn to use utensils. If you're a fast eater you might occasionally take the time to eat slowly with your child. You might begin feeding your child a few minutes before the rest of the family. Children learn by touching - give them time to explore food.

### Overeating

I get approval and attention from the family when I eat a lot. Everyone else asks for seconds.

Reduce portion sizes. Don't force a child to take "just one more bite" or "clean his plate". Learn to prepare foods without adding extra calories - avoid sauces, breading or frying. Encourage more physical activity. Use a few kind words, a hug, a game, a toy, etc. as rewards and comforters rather than food.

## A SAMPLE MENU

Food Group	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Snacks Throughout The Day	Total Servings For Today	Total Recommended Servings
FRUIT & VEGETABLES	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) unsweetened orange juice	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) cole slaw	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) green beans. 125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) apple juice	$\frac{1}{2}$ banana	$4\frac{1}{2}$	4 to 5
MILK & MILK PRODUCTS	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) milk	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) milk	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) milk	45 g ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz.) cheese	$2\frac{1}{2}$	2 to 3
MEAT & ALTERNATES	1 egg	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) baked beans	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) chicken	60 g (2 oz.)	2	2
BREAD & CEREALS	$\frac{1}{2}$ slice whole wheat toast	$\frac{1}{2}$ slice whole wheat bread	125 mL ( $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) brown rice	3 crackers 1 muffin	$3\frac{1}{2}$	3 to 5

HOW IS YOUR CHILD DOING TODAY?  
WRITE IN WHAT SHE OR HE EATS, BELOW

Food Group	Breakfast	Lunch	Supper	Snacks Throughout The Day	Total Servings commended For Today	Total Servings
FRUIT & VEGETABLES					4 to 5	
MILK & MILK PRODUCTS					2 to 3	
MEAT & ALTERNATES					2	
BREAD & CEREALS					3 to 5	



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